



CATECHETICAL SERMONS ON THE DIVINE LITURGY

PREFACE



Byzas' Place (Byzantium) began as a small port city on the European side of the Bosphorus settled originally by Thracians more than eleven centuries before Christ and called Lygos. It became a Greek settlement about six centuries before Christ, and the Romans took the site in 196 AD. The original liturgical tradition for the celebration of the Eucharist at Byzantium was the "West Syrian" tradition of Antioch in Syria, where we were first called Christians, and which today is represented by the Maronite Church. When the Emperor Constantine chose the site for his new capital to be called New Rome and then better known as Constantinople (Constantine's City), the liturgy there began to develop in its own way from the fourth to eight centuries. It had become independent from Antioch in 381 AD. One would presume that Constantine brought many courtiers from Western Europe which prompted some changes in the liturgical practices over time, and which developed eventually into the Patriarchate of Constantinople. So over the centuries the format for the Divine Liturgy has changed, with some things being removed or else said silently by the clergy, and with some new things being inserted, or elements being rearranged. As a result of all this fluidity, the logical order of the Liturgy is sometimes obscured or twisted. And perhaps no part has changed as much as the opening portion, the gathering.

Writing in the mid-second Christian century at Rome, Justin Martyr—who had established a catechetical school for adults there—give an outline of the order for the celebration of the Eucharist. He writes, "No one may share the Eucharist with us unless he believes that what we teach is true, unless he is washed in the regenerating waters of baptism for the remission of his sins, and unless he lives in accordance with the principles given to us by Christ." To this day those prerequisites are still required for an ethical and fruitful sharing in the Eucharist. He goes on to give an outline of the service. "On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or the countryside. The recollections of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as there is time. When the reader has finished, the leader of the assembly speaks to us, urging everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings. Then we all stand up to pray together. At the conclusion of our prayer, bread, wine and water are brought out. The leader offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people give their assent by saying 'Amen!' The Eucharist is distributed and everyone partakes, then the deacons take it to those who are absent." St. Justin does mention that those with the resources make a contribution if they wish, and the funds are used for the needy, etc. The collection seems to be made outside the ritual proper. This pattern remains the skeleton on which all the other rites and ceremonies are situated.